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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-02 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00
DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00
COME-00 EB-08 INR-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 TRSE-00
AID-05 IO-13 OC-06 CCO-00 HA-05 SY-05 MCT-01
OPR-02 A-01 CA-01 PM-05 H-01 L-03 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 CU-04 /118 W
----------009240 251822Z /43/46
O 251405Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9697
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY CAIRO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 0587

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA 2)

PARIS FOR LABATT

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB PGOV TS
SUBJ: GENERAL STRIKE CALL

REF: TUNIS 0534

1. DURING OTTO KERSTEN (ICFTU) PRESS CONFERENCE HELD AT UGTT HEADQUARTERS, HABIB ACHOUR ANNOUNCED A "NATIONAL GENERAL STIKE OF WARNING" LASTING TWENTY-FOUR HOURS TO BEGIN MIDNIGHT WEDNESDAY, JAN 25. HE SAID THAT THE EXECUTIVE BOARD YESTERDAY (TUESDAY) HAD DECIDED TO ACCERLATE THE STRIKE CALL IN PROTEST AGAINST THE CONFIDENTIAL

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INVASION AND DAMAGING OF FOUR OF ITS REGIONAL HALLS AND AGAINST THE ARREST OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL ABDERRIZAK GHORBAL IN SFAX.

2. THERE WERE WIDESPREAD REPORTS OF MASS DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE DOWNTOWN AREAS OF TUNIS TUESDAY EVENING WITH INJURIES, SOME DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY AND CONSIDERABLE

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BROKEN GLASS. TWO EMBASSY EMPLOYEES FURNISHED EYEWITNESS
ACCOUNTS OF TUESDAY EVENING'S DISORDERS IN THE CENTRAL
CITY. THE FIRST WAS PRESENT NEAR UGTT HEADQUARTERS
AT CONCLUSION OF KERSTEN PRESS CONVERENCE. EVEN THOUGH
KERSTEN AND ACHOUR SPOKE IN A LOW-KEY, NON-KEY, NON-INFLAMMATORY
MANNER, UPWARDS OF 2,000 DEMONSTRATORS MASSED IN THE
SMALL PLAZA FACING UGTT HEADQUARTERS AND ITS ADJACENT
NETWORK OF NARROW STREETS. RINGING THE DEMONSTRATORS
OVER A THREE-BLOCK RADIUS WERE PERHAPS 800 POLICE
AND SECURITY FORCES. APPARENTLY NO CONFRONTATION AROSE
FROM THESE "OPPOSING FORCES." HOWEVER, ABOUT FOUR HOURS
LATER, AT 9:30 P.M., ANOTHER EMBASSY EMPLOYEE PASSED
THROUGH AN AREA ABOUT FOUR BLOCKS FROM UGTT HEADQUARTERS.
THIS AREA WAS UNNATURALLY QUIET AND EVACUATED.
SUDDENLY HE SPOTTED DOWN A SIDE STREET A VERY LARGE
MOB BENT ON DESTRUCTION. DUE TO THE WARREN OF
STREETS IN THE LOCALE, HIS AND ANOTHER ACCOMPANYING CAR
WERE PARTIALLY TRAPPED BETWEEN ELEMENTS OF THE MOB AND
A POLICE VAN WHICHLHAD RUSHED TO THE SCENE. SOME OF
THE MOB TARGETED ON THE PLICE VAN, ROCKING IT
WILDLY AND DAMAGED THE OTHER ACCOMPANYI G CAR WITH
STONES. BOTH CARS MANAGED TO ESCAPE THE SCENE AND
NOTICED THAT THE STREET WHICH BORDERS THE METWPW
(OLD CITY) WAS COVERED WITH SHARDS OF GLASS. MEMBERS
OF THE MOB APPEARED TO TH WITNESS TO BE YOUNG TEENAGERS
OR STUDENTS WHO HAD PO RELATIONSHIP TO THE UNION
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DEMONSTRATION. NEITHER WITNESS OBSERVED ANY PLACARDS
OR LEAFLETS BUT THE FIRST HEARD ANTI-GOVERNMENT
CHANTS DURING THE DEMONSTARTION ITSELF.

3. IN CHANCE MEETING WITH LABOFF WEDNESDAY MORNING,
THAMEUR ACHOUR, HIBIB AQHOUR'S SON AND UGTT ADVISOR,
ALLEGED THAT THERE HAD BEEN AN "ATTEMPTED AMBUSH"
AGAINST HABIB BEN ACHOUR, REGIONAL UGTT DELEGATE AT
SOUSSE. HE SAID THAT THE AUTHORITIES APPEARED TO BE
CONCENTRATING THEIR EFFORTS AGAINST THE LEADERS
SURROUNDNG HIS FATHER. ACHOUR SAID THAT THE POLICE
HAD "INVADED" UGTTHEADQUARTERS IN TUNIS LAST EVENING
(TUESDAY) FOLLOWING THE PRESS CONVERENCE, AND HE
REITERATED THAT THE UNION WOULD ACHIEVE "ONE HUNDRED
PERCENT" ADHERENCE TO THE GENERAL STRIKE.

4. MEDIA HAS MOUNTED A STRONG BARRAGE AGAINST STRIKE
CALL TO MINIMIZE EFFECT AND DISCOURAGE WORKER
PARTICIPATION, THUS RENDERING PRESS AND TELEVISION
ACCOUNTS, AS WELL AS OUR USUAL INTERESTED CONTACTS,
PARTICULARLY UNRELIABLE DURING THIS PERIOD.
MULCAHY

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Message Attributes

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